

DIOCESE OF BALASORE
Circular No. 1/2014

BISHOP'S HOUSE
BALASORE – 756 001

25th January 2014

My dear Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and Lay Faithful,

At the outset, I wish that the New Year 2014 be an year of abundant blessings for all of you and for your works. I thank you very much for your Christmas and New Year greetings.

1. Episcopal Ordination:

The Episcopal Ordination of Rt. Rev. Msgr. Simon Kaipuram, C.M., the Bishop-elect of Balasore will be held at Balasore on 30th January 2014 at 9 a.m. Most Rev. Salvatore Pennacchio, the Apostolic Nuncio to India will be the Principal Consecrator. All of you are cordially invited for it. After the Episcopal Ordination and the Installation, at 12.30 p.m., there will be a programme of felicitation to the new Bishop. Fellowship Meal will be at 1.30 p.m. The Apostolic Nuncio will be leaving Balasore for New Delhi at 3.30 p.m.

2. Blessing of the De Paul Seva Sadan (HIV/AIDS Care Centre):

On 29th January at 5.30 p.m., Most Rev. Salvatore Pennacchio, the Apostolic Nuncio will be blessing the newly constructed De Paul Seva Sadan (HIV/AIDS Care Centre) at Kuruda, Balasore. It will be run by the Congregation of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent De Paul. The Diocese is very grateful to the Daughters of Charity for taking up the new HIV/AIDS Care Centre at Balasore.

3. My new residence at Balasore:

After giving charge of the Diocese to my Successor Bishop Simon Kaipuram, C.M., the new Bishop of Balasore Diocese, on 1st February 2014, I will shifting my residence to Vianney Bhavan, Kuruda, Balasore – 756056. As such, from 1st February 2014 onwards, my new contact address will be the following:

Rt. Rev. Thomas Thiruthalil, C.M.
Emeritus Bishop of Balasore
Vianney Bhavan
Jyothi Hospital Campus
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4. A reflection on my Episcopate for forty years:

I am sending you herewith my reflection on my Episcopate for forty years, out of it, 24 years spent in Balasore Diocese. I take this occasion to thank you all very much for your prayers, support and collaboration for the apostolate in Balasore Diocese. Please extend your whole hearted cooperation to my Successor Bishop Simon Kaipuram, C.M. May the good Lord bless you in abundant measure. Please keep me in your prayers. God bless you.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

Thomas Thiruthalil, C.M.
Bishop of Balasore

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BALASORE – 756 001**

25th January 2014

A reflection on my Episcopate for Forty Years

(Thomas Thiruthalil, C.M., Bishop of Balasore)

My dear Fathers, Brothers, Sisters and Lay Faithful,

My service as the Bishop of Balasore has come to an end. It was a long innings of 40 years. I was elevated to serve the church in Orissa as a Bishop when I was 38 years old. As for me, the call was a sheer surprise and gratuitous gift. The God who called me '*supply every need according to his riches*' (Phil: 4:19) to serve his flock living '*closely to the vine and bore abundant fruit*' (cfr: Jn: 15:4). Thus I think, *his Father was glorified* (Jn: 15:8). This change of the leadership would have happened three years ago, coinciding with my seventy-fifth birthday. But yet again God gave me additional time to be with you and toil for his kingdom. He kept me in good health and immensely blessed me with grace and peace. However, I had been expecting this hour and preparing myself for it, and I feel quite content about emeritus (retiring). I have been the Bishop of this diocese of Balasore for 24 years, and the responsibility was rewarding. I gratefully lift up my heart to the Lord and my memory is vivid with incidents of great providence.

Changing world and the Church:

The last 40 years have seen irrevocable changes in the society and the church. Explosion of the communication technology and mass media has altered the way we live and relate. When the world has become a global village, the causality was the dignity of the individual and the integrity of family. There are countless obstacles to the moral life of man, in a society of consumerism and rampant hedonism. The surge of secularism which attempts not only to eliminate rights to religious expression, but to eradicate from men's consciousness the duties of religion and the sense of the sacred.

In the ecclesial front too, the effect of the Vatican Council II was far reaching. The Church challenged her daughters and sons to open the doors wide open to unknown frontiers. Looking back, I feel happy to be part of this human history. There was a good will and hope lurking in the society and the church even in the face of wars, apostasy, hunger and diseases. Though there is a peripheral abandoning of the Church, her role as a sign of hope became more relevant. The Bishop's teaching is called to embody a powerful proclamation of the reasons for hope. (Cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). I am thankful to the Lord; there was sufficient chance for me to proclaim Jesus Christ as the encompassing centre of Christian life and of all history of humanity.

Mission of a Bishop:

The Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, cannot functionally exist without a hierarchical structure to ensure its organic unity. The Church expresses and displays its identity as a visibly gathered community. The Church assembles in a single faith and worship having as its origin the preaching of the Apostles. The Bishop is the successor of the Apostles, sent out to guide the flock of Christ and ensure the unity of the flock. The Bishop is a representative of Christ, commissioned to bear witness to him, to speak in his name, and to preserve all that has been handed down by means of the apostolic body (cfr: LG: 21). St. Paul instructed Timothy in the following words: "*And what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.*" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The unique purpose of the Bishop is "to build up in communion the one and only Body of Christ until it reaches full maturity." (cfr: 2 Cor: 10:8). The identity and mission of the Church is communion. Bishops are guardians and servants of communion. What one does follows from what one is. By virtue of his consecration and in a sacramental way, the Bishop is the embodiment of Christ and the Gospel message. He is a symbol of the unity of Christ and the Church. Acting "*in persona Christi*," Bishops are a sign, voice, and means of salvation; they carry out—in visible form—the role of Christ as teacher, priest, and shepherd.

To the successors of the Apostles is entrusted the entire People of God: with the assistance of their priests, Bishops thus have the responsibility of preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments, and guiding Christ's flock. God had abundantly blessed me with two vibrant communities of faithful in two nascent dioceses, innumerable priests and religious, immense possibility of evangelizing and tending his flock belong to various ethnic groups.

A word about my ministry:

My prime concern in ministry as Bishop had been to share the good news with you, the people of the Diocese, and to help you grow in your call to personal holiness and social responsibility. As a bishop, I am convinced that it my principle duty is to help you to grow in full virtue according to your personal call. The focus of a bishop's ministry '*as they are preachers of faith and authentic teachers*' (cft: LG 25), must be first and foremost among the faithful and then among the people of good will in the diocesan territory. Odisha is a receptive land for the word of God to germinate and flourish. The rich fruits of our pioneer missionaries of the past prove that this soil is still fertile for evangelization work. The Santhal and Ho missions which we have established are the living witness to the same. Faith formation and formation of small Christian communities were our special focus. Laity organization and grooming their leadership were our concerns. I had inherited a special love for formation of clergy which was a characteristic trait of the Congregation of Mission to which I belong.

I always believed that it is the critical responsibility of the Bishop, more than anyone else, to promote vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. My initial ministry immediately after the ordination has cemented my love for the same. God has made me an instrument for the formation of his ministers. My joy is welled when I could ordain 30 to the priesthood in Balasore Diocese.

Pluralistic religiosity of Odisha and her multi linguistic heritage calls us to a dialogical life of witness and relation. The triple dialogue with religions, cultures and poor, envisaged by FABC is actualized in every effort of the diocesan ministries. I was often wonderstruck by the rich religiosity and openness of the common man in Odisha. Their simplicity and personal warmth has enhanced my world view. Odisha is always open to the presence of God in divergent ways. There is an innate goodness permeating in this atmosphere. Our net working and outreach through education, health services, women empowerment, social service and dialogue paid a rich dividend. Our disaster preparedness, relief and rehabilitation responses were always acclaimed. All these have helped to push our boundaries still further geographically and earned us good will of all.

My gratitude and thanks:

I am blessed to work under four Popes in Catholic Church. I am thankful to Pope Paul VI for appointing me to be the bishop of Berhampur. I believe we all have potential that we don't use unless we are challenged to use it. A new demanding environment helps us to grow, and to achieve things we thought we could not do. I have grown personally in my faith life through this opportunity in a way that I might not have done otherwise. It was a big boost to work under the aegis of blessed John Paul II. I have fond memories of meeting him. He has made a lot of influence on my psyche and ministry. The sheer intellectual pursuit and honesty of Benedict was worth emulating. And recently, the option for the poor repeatedly recommended by Pope Francis and his life style has confirmed all what I learned in my Vincentian formation and my association with the Spanish missionaries of yester years. As someone rightly observed, the last three popes of Catholic Church stand for the hope, faith and charity. Their inspiring leadership has deepened these cardinal virtues in me which I could dispense generously in my ministry in two dioceses.

I am thankful for the opportunities to be with you in parishes and various ministries. There has been the opportunity to perhaps share some of my knowledge, but more so to learn from each of you. I am grateful to all those who have worked with me in my ministry, the clergy, religious, lay leaders throughout the parishes. The bishop often gets the credit for things that others may have conceived or implemented. However, most things that are achieved in a diocese are the work of many rather than just one. It is the selfless collaborative work of many which gave glitter to my episcopate. The spirit of unity which is the gift of the Holy Spirit was abundantly bestowed to my presbiterium. Perhaps the Blessed Mother, queen of the apostles, has protected us very especially from all divisive forces and negative elements.

My future plan:

It is said that a soldier never retires but he just fades away. As a foot soldier of my Master Jesus Christ and especially as the follower of St. Vincent, I do not see retirement as the end of my ministry, but as a transition to a new stage of life. I lived in Odisha for 62 years. I will continue to serve the people of God in this diocese through the sacramental ministry and the pursuit of my personal spiritual journey. This is a ministry I can continue, even without any administrative responsibility. Evangelization, formation of the clergy, health services and education specially of the girl child had been my priorities as Bishop, and I certainly hope to continue this work in my retirement. I had prayer support from several people which sustained my ministry. Now I can reciprocate it by my ministry of prayer for them. You all will be in my prayers. I am confident that you will continue to pray for me. I am indebted to you for everything you have given me, for everything you have given the Diocese of Balasore and through that, gift given the whole Church. I have valued you, delighted in you and wish you every happiness and every blessing in the years ahead. There is a special call for us to be involved, to remain in the love of the Lord no matter where we are.

Finally, I appeal you to collaborate with my Successor. Bishop Simon Kaipuram, C.M. is learned, unassuming and spirit filled man. God has given us a good pastor. I raise my heart in joyous thankfulness for the personality of our new Bishop. As the diocese is a family, the local Bishop is its head. The family may not be a perfect one. But we make all our efforts to stick together. May all of you be blessed in abundant measure as you earnestly work for the Lord and his people. God bless you.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

**Thomas Thiruthalil, C.M.
Bishop of Balasore**